

Policy Extinguishes Secondhand Smoke Exposure

Issue

As a mother and her four year-old enter the local health department for a check up, the family is forced to pass through a cloud of smoke burning from the end of a lit cigarette. At another health department, an elderly couple stands in line to receive a flu shot. While waiting with hundreds of others, they are covered in secondhand smoke drifting from ahead.

These scenarios are not uncommon in South Carolina. Secondhand smoke exposure exists in private and public businesses affecting people across the state. Healthcare costs directly caused by smoking annually top \$1 billion in South Carolina. However, this staggering figure does not include additional health-related costs from secondhand smoke exposure.

Better awareness and education about the hazards of exposure to secondhand smoke has mobilized businesses and communities to adopt smoke free policies and entrance restrictions. Scientist James Repace and other experts assert smoking should be moved away from doorways to eliminate exposure to secondhand smoke. However, the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control's previous policy did not provide for restrictions banning smoking around building entrances.

Intervention

In June 2005, the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) blazed the way to prevent exposure to secondhand smoke at local health departments. Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant staff provided the impetus to revise and strengthen DHEC's smoke free policy. Because DHEC is a state agency, SC law requires clean indoor air in all of its buildings. However, the strengthened smoke free policy sets precedence and includes 50-foot entrance restrictions, meaning no one is allowed to smoke within 50 feet of all main entrances at DHEC buildings.

Impact

The SC DHEC smoke free policy revision resulted in the following improvements:

- One hundred and twenty DHEC sites adopted 50 foot entrance restrictions for all main entrances;
- Eight health department sites went completely smoke free as of January 1, 2006;
- Thirty-eight health department sites are working towards completely smoke free campus policies;
- Hundreds of clients served at each health department site are further protected from secondhand smoke while entering and exiting buildings; and
- SC DHEC as the leading health authority in the state now sets an example for smoke free policy at worksites, hopefully impacting other organizations, businesses and communities to do the same.

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